



**Eastern Sierra Council of Governments (ESCOG)
Joint Powers Authority Agenda**

Memorandum

To: Town Council of the Town of Mammoth Lakes

From: ESCOG Joint Powers Authority

Subject: Consider Concept Application for the State of California, Caltrans, Reconnecting Communities: Highways to Boulevard Grant (Cal RC:H2B Grant) and Adopt a Resolution of the Town Council of the Town of Mammoth Lakes, Authorizing the Eastern Sierra Council of Governments to Submit an Application for the California Department of Transportation Reconnecting Communities: Highways to Boulevards Grant

Meeting date: September 6, 2023

Prepared on: August 22, 2023

Attachments: A) Resolution of the Town Council of the Town of Mammoth Lakes, Authorizing the Eastern Sierra Council of Governments to Submit an Application for the California Department of Transportation Reconnecting Communities: Highways to Boulevards Grant
B) Letter of Support
C) Project Area Map
D) Existing Plan Inventory

BACKGROUND/HISTORY:

At the August 18th ESCOG meeting, Caltrans requested the ESCOG serve as the lead application for the Highways-to-Boulevards Grant opportunity. The ESCOG Board approved a resolution authorizing staff to prepare an submit an application for grant funding on behalf of the region.

The H2B grant has \$149 million in available funds to be distributed across only three awards: one urban, one rural, and one corridor. The applications are due September 20, 2023. In order to apply, the ESCOG requires a resolution of authority from each of member agencies. If awarded, affected jurisdictions along the Highway 395 corridor would be partners to the project, which would include planning, design and engineering, and implementation.

Research by D9 and ESCOG staff, in consultation with Caltrans Reconnecting Communities Program, has led to the conclusion that the best course of action for the proposed partnership would be to apply

for the Cal RC:H2B Grant under the “Corridor” designation. As a Corridor applicant, if awarded a grant, the funds could be used on projects in different communities all along the 395 Corridor in both Mono and Inyo Counties. The grant guidelines specify that the project scope, schedule, and budget are not expected to be finalized as part of the application submission; rather, the grant application functions more as a call for proposals. If a grant is awarded, Caltrans will work with the partnering agencies to define the project scope, schedule, and budget.

From the grant guidelines: “An application will include the full projected lifecycle of a project(s) from concept to final completion, **but may not have defined scope, schedule, and budget for all phases at time of application.** A project may include multiple phases and components. The potential for concurrent or expedited delivery of project components or phase components may be considered, as determined prior to the start of each project phase.”

Project work is expected to be completed in 2026. The tight timeline, paired with the complexity of implementation across numerous partners and geographies will limit the ability to implement physical infrastructure: however, the grant presents an opportunity to move many of the larger visions of the communities on the 395 corridor from planning to “shovel ready” projects, which each jurisdiction and Caltrans can leverage to expedient implementation through other funding sources in the future.

Awarded funds can also be used as a match for the Federal Infrastructure Bill Highways to Boulevards program, allowing this opportunity to be a catalyst for larger project opportunities in the future.

Description of Proposed Project Scope:

If a grant is awarded, the first phase is a mandated “Community Readiness” phase, in which all partners and Caltrans Headquarters would audit existing plans for project readiness. It is during this phase that the scope, schedule, and budget would be finalized. The outcomes and deliverables of the Community Readiness phase will be the preparation of a preliminary outline or vision of the projected future phases and components, including a draft financial plan, identification of community stakeholders/ partners and their role(s), and a plan to address the applicable Program Goals and efforts proposed in the application. A detailed scope, schedule, and budget will also be developed for the next phase of the project. Prior to initiating work on each phase, or a component of each phase, the awardee shall work with Caltrans to prepare a PSA that includes the scope, schedule, and budget.

The scope is broadly proposed as the following:

Phase 1: Consolidate already completed plans into a single corridor plan. Staff has been working with Caltrans and regional partners to develop a library of existing planning documents and previous visioning efforts.

- Confirm public support for the concepts proposed in past planning efforts. The ESCOG and its consultants will work with partner agencies to confirm the adopted plans are still relevant and desirable.
- Identify planning gaps for achieving the broader corridor vision. Several communities do not have plans in place documenting the communities’ concerns regarding Highway 395 and a vision to mitigate those concerns in their central business district. These communities include Independence, Big Pine, and some Tribal communities. (see Attachment C).
- Identify common themes for incremental project implementation. Analysis of existing plans has identified similar traffic calming solutions identified in each community, including standardized gateway signage for each community with a consistent Eastern Sierra branding, consistent speeds coming into communities, enhanced crosswalk visibility, streetscaping, and street trees.

Phase 2: Conduct planning studies for identified gaps. Several communities do not have individual downtown community or specific plans in place documenting the community's vision. The ESCOG and its consultants will work with partner agencies to develop a vision specific to the scope of this funding opportunity to address Main Street enhancements.

This phase can also be leveraged to implement identified next steps from other planning efforts if desired by the community in Phase 1 without committing to full design and engineering. For instance, the Bishop Area Access and Circulation Feasibility Study includes recommendations for an alternative truck route and improved City circulation which can be advanced by determining community support for a preferred alignment and conducting initial feasibility studies.

Phase 3: Prepare design / engineering for projects identified for near-term and long-term implementation. This phase will be informed by the Community Readiness Phase and Phase 1 to determine the status of existing planning projects, which can be implemented within the term of the grant funding, and which can move into design and engineering phases to become "shovel ready" projects.

Phase 4: Implement incremental projects. Projects that can be moved through design, engineering, and encroachment within the funding timeline may be advanced for implementation. Such projects may include the implementation of the 2010 Highway 395 Corridor Enhancement Project (gateway signage, the 2021 Sustainable Tourism and Recreation Initiative Scenic Byway Analysis, and streetscaping projects within each community.

Project implementation would occur through each partnering jurisdiction through encroachment permits from Caltrans. The infrastructure improvements would be owned and maintained by the implementing agency unless otherwise agreed upon.

If ESCOG and D9 are awarded Cal RC:H2B Grant funds, the moneys would be used to hire a consultant to refine and advance select ideas previously explored and identified in the many planning studies and bring them to a "shovel-ready" status. If the grant schedule allowed, it may even be possible to start construction on several of the projects. Also, even if this grant schedule does not allow us to fund the construction of projects, the monies would have brought several projects through final design, making them "shovel ready" and then eligible for construction grants through the Federally funded Reconnecting Community: Highways to Boulevard grant program which is also generously funded. Cal RC:H2B Grant funds could also be used as a match for the similarly named Federal program. Caltrans Headquarters and D9 staff will also help find funding sources to complete the projects that are initiated with the Cal RC:H2B Grant.

Conceptual Budget:

As described, the H2B proposal does not require a finalized budget. The conceptual budget below is for consideration and is subject to change.

Phase	Amount
Phase 1	\$750k
Phase 2	\$1.5M
Phase 3	\$8M
Phase4	\$30M
Total	\$40.25M

ALTERNATIVES:

Do not attempt to apply for the grant. The Eastern Sierra Council of Governments requires the approval from each member agency to apply for this funding on behalf of the region. The ESCOG is the only regional authority that can apply on behalf of all member agency jurisdictions.

BUDGET IMPACTS:

No budget impacts are associated with the preparation of the grant application. Caltrans has generously provided staff to assist with writing and coordinating the application.

If the grant is awarded, there is no matching grant requirement nor is there a requirement to submit a budget to be considered for a grant award. Grants will be awarded based on need and the quality and completeness of the application. Budgets and grant scope will be established after the grant is awarded. Also, the unique nature of this grant program is set up with the understanding that small communities do not have the financial assets to lay out funds of this magnitude, even for a short period of time. The RC:H2B is a reimbursement program for eligible costs incurred to the designated implementing agency for each individual phase. Payments to contractors and consultants will be paid directly from funds from the State of California, through the co-applicant, Caltrans District 9 on behalf of the winning grantee. Staff salaries for those working directly on the project are an eligible expense.

RECOMMENDATION:

The ESCOG requests the Town Council of the Town of Mammoth Lakes:

- 1) Resolution of the Town Council of the Town of Mammoth Lakes, Authorizing the Eastern Sierra Council of Governments to Submit an Application for the California Department of Transportation Reconnecting Communities: Highways to Boulevards Grant.
- 2) Provide a letter of support as a co-applicant to the Highways-to-Boulevards grant.